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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2017

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [MOPS](#) [SO](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: Somalia--Belarus IL-76 Probably Shot Down

Classified by PolOff John O'Leary. 1.4 (b) & (d)

Ref: A) Nairobi 1134 B) Nairobi 1198

¶1. (U) A Belarus registered IL-76 crashed after taking off from Mogadishu airport on Friday, March 23. All 11 passengers and crew were killed. Though the plane was not affiliated with AMISOM, it reportedly had brought engineers and parts to repair the AMISOM-chartered IL-76 damaged while landing in Mogadishu on March 9 (reftels).

¶2. (U) There were reports that the crew had reported engine trouble before the crash, indicating simple mechanical failure. The Islamic radical group al-Shabaab, the military wing of the ousted Islamic Courts (IC), claimed on an IC website that it had shot down the aircraft and that "any airplane that lands at Mogadishu Airport will be treated as enemy aircraft."

¶3. (S) Reports reaching the Embassy indicate that, in response to open-ended questions, multiple witnesses to the crash event told essentially the same story:

--two or three missiles were fired at the aircraft;

--the missiles trailed white smoke;

--the missiles veered from a straight course and followed the aircraft.

¶4. (S) According to available information, the witness reports indicate that the weapon used may have been an SA-18. We are told that SA-18 doctrine requires the launching of three missiles at a target in order to maximize chances of a hit. Additionally, if the missiles were launched in accordance with doctrine, this fact would imply that the perpetrators had received training on the SA-18 weapon system.

¶5. (C) If the incident was a shoot down, several questions arise:

--Why shoot expensive missiles at an empty plane leaving Mogadishu instead of a full plane arriving?

--Why did the perpetrators not videotape the incident for maximum propaganda value?

--Were the perpetrators simply trying to make a point, to prove that they could bring down a plane? Why not a full one?

¶6. (C) Unlike the previous IL-76 incident on March 9 (reftels), the Embassy would consider this a probable shoot down, though not conclusive pending credible forensic confirmation. The al-Qaida-linked al-Shabaab certainly has the will to attack an aircraft and

could have the capability. Other Islamic radical groups claiming to exist in Mogadishu might also have access to SA-18's, but only al-Shabaab is claiming responsibility at this time.

Ranneberger